

fast FACTS...

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about Sedgwick County Government



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FACTS...

Understanding Rabies

What is rabies?

Rabies is a preventable viral disease of mammals most often transmitted through the bite of a rabid animal. The vast majority of rabies cases reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) each year occur in wild animals like raccoons, skunks, bats, and foxes. In 2001, 7,437 cases of rabies were reported in the United States. Wild animals accounted for 93% of these cases. Raccoons accounted for almost 40% of reported cases.

Are dogs and cats at risk?

Domestic animals account for approximately 7% of the reported rabies cases, with cats, cattle, and dogs most often reported rabid.

How can people get rabies?

People usually get rabies from the bite of a rabid animal. It is also possible, but quite rare, that people might get rabies if infectious material from a rabid animal, such as saliva, gets directly into their eyes, nose, mouth or a wound.

Non-bite exposures to rabies are very rare. Scratches or abrasions contaminated with saliva from a rabid animal constitute non-bite exposures. Other contact, such as petting a rabid animal or contact with the blood, urine or feces of a rabid animal, does not constitute an exposure.

What are the symptoms of rabies in humans?

Rabies virus infects the central nervous system, causing encephalopathy and ultimately death. Early symptoms of rabies in humans are nonspecific, consisting of fever, headache, and general malaise. As the disease progresses, neurological symptoms appear and may include insomnia, anxiety, confusion, slight or partial paralysis, excitation, hallucinations, agitation, hypersalivation, difficulty swallowing, and hydrophobia (fear of water). Death usually occurs within days of the onset of symptoms.

What to do to prevent rabies

- Keep vaccinations up-to-date for all dogs, cats and ferrets. This not only protects your pets, but also provides protection to you.
- Keep your pets under supervision to avoid contact with wild animals. If your pet is bitten by a stray or wild animal, seek veterinary assistance immediately.
- Call your local Animal Control to remove any stray animals from your neighborhood.
- Avoid contact with unfamiliar animals. Teach children not to handle or pet unfamiliar animals, even if they appear friendly.
- Do not try to nurse sick, stray animals to health. Call your local Animal Control.

Is rabies contagious?

Casual contact, such as touching a person with rabies or contact with non-infectious fluid or tissue does not constitute an exposure, requiring medical treatment. In addition, contact with someone who is receiving rabies vaccination does not constitute rabies exposure.

What medical treatment is available for rabies?

Medical assistance should be obtained as soon as possible after an exposure. Specific medical attention for someone exposed is "postexposure prophylaxis" — this is a regimen of one dose of immune globulin and five doses of rabies vaccine over a 28-day period. This is a very expensive process.

How can I get more information?

If you fear that you may have been exposed to an animal with rabies, you should contact your physician immediately. You may also call the Sedgwick County Health Department at 660-7392.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has in-depth information about rabies available through their website at www.cdc.gov.

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working for you